

# Can Exercise Really Help? How?

Exercise or increased physical activity can positively affect mood. It is not a replacement for therapy and medical treatment of mood disorders but can help manage symptoms. The Mayo Clinic reports that research has shown that exercising as little as 10 to 15 minutes a day can have short-term mood improvement and that 30 minutes a day can significantly improve symptoms and also may help prevent relapse of depression.

Exercise positively affects the body in many ways; it decreases stress, anxiety, irritability and fatigue by increasing the body temperature, which has a calming effect, increasing the endorphins, the “feel-good” brain chemical, and improving sleep. It also helps by decreasing the stress hormone cortisol and relieving muscle tension.

Physical activity also helps the mind by building confidence through a sense of accomplishment, offering a distraction, providing interaction with others and being a healthy coping skill.

Springtime is a great time to start or restart an exercise program. The only problem is most people start with failure in mind, so here are some of the tips for starting the right program that you can keep up and that will grow with you.

If possible get a check up before starting an exercise program. When you get the okay, assess your current fitness level; make note of how long it takes you to walk ½ a mile or 1 mile, what your pulse is after that time or after 10 minutes of your chosen exercise, and the number of sit-ups or push-ups possible.

Remember to start slow; overdoing it in the beginning often leads people to quit exercising before it becomes a habit. Plan out your program. Think of your goals: mood improvement, weight loss, etc; and set your activities accordingly. Start off with a few minutes a day and work up your time.

Start slowly and build up gradually. Try working out more often, and break things up. Do a few minutes of exercise several times a day, and then increase by slowly adding more time to each session. After a month, start increasing the intensity of the workout. Plan a logical progression. Set a schedule for changes, such as adding time weekly, and build the activity into your daily routine.

Buddy up and make exercise as pleasant as possible; use headphones, watch TV or talk to you partner. Keep a list of activities you like and dislike. Be creative; go ballroom dancing or gardening. Try to work in a variety of exercise.

Make sure you have what you need, such as sneakers, jump rope or swimsuit. You want them ready and waiting when you need them

Allow recovery time. Listen to your body. If you experience any pain, shortness of breath or nausea, take a break; don't push yourself too hard. Be flexible with your schedule; you're allowed to have a day off, maybe even 2.

Put it on paper. Monitor your progress and at 6 weeks, 3 months and 6 months. Recheck the tests you did to assess your fitness level and make note of changes in the time spent exercising and any progress toward goals.

If motivation is decreasing, choose a new activity or even a new goal. Don't think of exercise as a burden, once its part of your schedule it's just a routine.

*References:*

The Mayo Clinic at [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)